



CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Health & Human Services
Division of Public Health



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Matilde Castiel, MD
Health & Human Services
Commissioner

Karyn E. Clark
Public Health
Director

DATE: April 5, 2021
RE: WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING / PUBLIC HEARING
START TIME: 6:30 PM
LOCATION: WEBEX MEETING

Welcome & Introductions:

Meeting was called to order at 6:30pm.

Members on WebEx: Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen and David Fort
WPDH Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of DPH, Colleen Bolen, Deputy Director of DPH, Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH, Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS and Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse
Guest: Edward Augustus, Jr., City Manager, Joseph Petty, Mayor, City Councilors; Morris Bergman, Donna Colorio, Khrystian King, Gary Rosen, George Russell and Sarai Rivera

Approval of the March 1, 2021 Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting minutes of March 1, 2021 made by Frances Anthes, Seconded by Chareese Allen –with an amendment – Approved

Brief discussion on “Mass Shootings, Gun Violence and Safety, and Public Health”

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Read the following statement:

Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Delaina Ashley Yaun Gonzalez, Paul Andre Michels, Chung Park, Hyun Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Police Officer Eric Tally, Tralona Bartkowiak, Suzanne Fountain, Teri Leiker, Kevin Mahoney, Lynn Murray, Rikki Olds, Neven Stanisic, Denny Stong, and Jody Waters.

We, the Board of Health of Worcester, Massachusetts, mourn the deaths of these 18 individuals who were killed in tragic mass shootings in Atlanta, Georgia and Boulder, Colorado over the past 3 weeks. Many of these lives were taken as a result of racism, hatred, and misogyny, and we stand in solidarity with the Asian American community who have been especially impacted by these and other acts of hatred and senseless violence.

All of these 18 people were the victims of a persistent public health threat in our country - gun violence and the ready access to firearms that are available to almost anyone. In 2020, gun violence killed nearly 20,000 Americans and an additional 24,000 died by suicide with a gun.

We, as public health officials, have an obligation and duty to speak out forcefully about this public health crisis. We advocate for sensible national firearm policies including comprehensive criminal background checks for all firearm purchases, mandating waiting periods for gun purchases, enacting extreme risk protection laws, outlawing military-style weapons and high-capacity



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magazines, closing loopholes that allow those prone to commit domestic violence to access firearms, developing child access protection measures, and improved screening and treatment for mental health disorders.

Finally, we strongly endorse the continued efforts of the Worcester Division of Public Health to address gun safety through various initiatives including the annual "Goods for Guns Buyback" - a collaboration with the Worcester Police Department, the Worcester County District Attorney, and UMass Memorial Medical Center.

Frances Anthes made a motion to approve the statement - Seconded by David Fort. Motion passed unanimously

Public Forum "Institutional Racism, Police Reform and Public Health"

Public Hearing opens at 6:45pm

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair – Reads information to the attendees on the purpose of the hearing and rules relating to 2 minute testimony, and stating name and residence

Edward Augustus, City Manager: Has taken and communicated a set of recommendations and actions with the City Council back in February. City Council had a meeting in early March, had a thorough conversation about many of those items, and took action. A summary was done by the Law Department on some of the changes that were enacted by the State legislature and signed into law by Governor Baker on the last day of 2020 that have a lot of relevance to policing, police oversight and accountability. There was a lot of interest on the changes, how were they going to be implemented, how are they going to be impactful in the City of Worcester. This package is available on the City of Worcester's website. The City will comply with all the new state laws that are in place. Read the executive order he issued. This order has set the framework for the ongoing development of institutional capacity for reflection, change and resiliency. Briefed the BOH on other recommendations and actions that were put in place. Talked about adding a dashboard on the City of Worcester's website relating to the Police Department, so the community can know the actions, activities and work being done.

David Fort: Welcomes the community and wants to hear their voices on police brutality, police reform and racism. Since the American Medical Association and the Public Health Association deemed racism and police brutality as a serious public health issue, the majority of the BOH has been committed to addressing these issues. Specifically, the BOH goals are to urge the City Manager, Police Chief and City Councilors to admit that systematic racism exists within all institutions including the Worcester Police Department. Identify police officers who possess anti-black and brown sentiments in the WPD. Prevent any incidents of police brutality, increase police accountability and ensure crystal clear transparency in investigating, punishing and dismissing those police officers who committed acts of police brutality or possess anti-black and brown sentiments. This meeting is intended for all invitees to listen and learn from the public. Invites the City Manager, WPD and the City Councilors to come to the next BOH meeting to address questions and concerns that we will hear from the public tonight.

Arielle Sharma, Worcester: Former criminal defense attorney whose clients of color experience racism every day. Clients face the inability to simply live their lives without being harassed and arrested by WPD.

Bob Michel, Worcester, Executive Committee Worcester NAACP: City Manager spoke about structural racism and how it has been extensively acknowledged. The appointed Worcester Police Chief has yet to affirm the existence of structural racism in his department. Racism does exist in the WPD and is deeply imbedded in the consciousness of many police officers. We look forward to the implementation of the recommendations and executive order.

Casey Burns, Director, Coalition for Healthy Greater Worcester: We are a community based coalition which is responsible for doing community engagement and improving overall participation and public health strategies to improve health. Majority of our work is in collaboration with Worcester Division of Public Health and engage around the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). We use data and community lead conversations with a cohort of community leaders who closely had conversations with people mostly impacted by health disparities. Have heard stories and testimonies of peoples experience in getting care for their families. Uses this information in order to identify both policy and strategies that will be prioritized over the next 5 years. Looking for BOH, who has always been a partner on health equity initiatives, as well as others to join and be able to boldly make these steps to accomplish these strategies.

Gordon Davis, Worcester: Same thing has happened in the past with the killing of Michael Brown. The city got together and then all the notes were lost. Nothing happened. I cannot find how to file a discrimination complaint against a city executive. Human Rights commission will not file it because there is an ordinance against it. When did that ordinance pass? City Manager's office refuses to go through public records and provide me with that information, which is systemic racism. What is in place to make sure there is transparency in the executive meetings that happens four times a year? Happy that the state past some legislations regarding the monitoring the police and hopes it will be enforced.

David Slatkin, Worcester: Victim of police brutality in Virginia when I was mistaken as the Boston Marathon Bomber. Here to support the Black and Brown communities. Unfortunately, people make mistakes and arrest the wrong people. That causes a lot of trauma and challenges. Painful to see that the Chief of WPD state that he never witnessed any discrimination. Feels it is wrong. We need to find a way to connect together as human beings and find the common good and kindness in one another. Until people can make themselves vulnerable, we are just going to continue to talk past one another instead of talking to one another.

Debbie Hall, Worcester: Originally from St. Louis. Michael Brown was not far from where I lived. There were lots of conversations and promises made to the community. I hope we stay vigilant and follow up and be transparent in what we are doing. I think the community is ready for it and I hope that the City is also.

Diane Langford, Worcester: It is about compassion and listening to each other and not talking at each other. There are facts and there are interpretations. We are dealing with facts right now. Looking to move forward peacefully and effectively.

Jacqueline Yang, Chairperson, Human Rights Commission: The Human Rights Commission was named in the executive order, we will work with WPD to host community listening sessions for the police body camera program and provide a report to the City Manager. Meeting with Chief Sargent at the May or June Human Rights meeting to provide us with updates. All are welcome to listen in to the next meeting.

Nelly Medina, Lead Organizer, Jobs with Justice Parents Program PUMA, Worcester: Feels that the executive order is a cover up. Why are there no city-funded organizations that have genuine ties with the cities youngest and most vulnerable youths? The City Manager boasts about funding organizations that babysit youths of color, who are on probation, but no word of justice addressing trauma or lives implemented in these spaces. We want basketball hoops in spaces so our black, brown and bi-population children can laugh and play. Our children will fall into crime and go down the prison pipeline if more is not done to address the inequities.

Fred Taylor, President, Worcester NAACP: Part of the problem with this society is that people are confusing facts with how it is interpreted. Worcester's NAACP priorities are; 1.) removing police from schools, 2.) creating a civilian review board, 3.) implementing body cameras.

Isabel Gonzalez, Executive Director, Worcester Interfaith: Spoke with individuals in the African community and other communities who are worried about what these reforms mean to them and interactions they had with the police. Feels if city forums are not held for these different populations, they will not be the best forums for our community. Many of the community want to see a civilian review board and not have investigations happen.

William Gardner, Worcester, former Worcester Police Officer: When I was a police officer, I was told by one of my Lieutenants that I did too much social work and not enough police work. He was angry that I was developing a diversion program with the Worcester Juvenile Court for young men who were just starting to get into trouble on the streets. Many police officers in the city treat people in the community as if they are not humans. Citizens, no matter what their status or condition, does not deserve less respect than any other human being does. These problems continue to this day.

Ben, Worcester: Important that this is not the end of this particular topic. Looking forward to changes happening.

Greta, Worcester, former wife of a Police Officer: Individuals come into this line of work with good intentions but within 4 to 5 years, they change to fit in. I have experienced racism within the police department being married to an officer. If you are related to a police officer, city councilor, or have law enforcement family then you are privileged. You can do whatever you want. You could be pulled over and just give your name and the officer will let you go.

Richard Cipro, Sargent Worcester Police Department Union President: Comments have been helpful tonight. We all have things we can improve on. Still waiting for people to tell WPD where the systemic racism is. What policies, procedures or things that we do that have been racist? We welcome City Managers equity review. We are not a racist police department. The word "racism" is thrown around freely.

David Connor, Worcester: There are documents and history of racism within the WPD. If you look at the Latino History Project of Worcester's research on the Great Brook Valley riot, (referring to Sgt Cipro's comment "where is systemic racism"), that is where you will find it. Encourages everyone to look up on YouTube the Christina Hernandez, 1994, case.

Johanna Hampton-Dance, Worcester: Disagrees with Sgt. Cipro regarding systemic racism not in our city. It is across the United States and to think Worcester is untouched is just mindless.

Has witnessed men and women of color assaulted by WPD. Had encountered hate crime, here in Worcester, but did not call police because they probably share the same sentiments. Just recently, there was a lawsuit against WPD for racism. Glad the City Manager put forth the reform and it was supported. Hopes for changes.

Rev. Clyde Talley, Worcester: Important for the community to know the methodology that is going to be used to resolve these issues. What 20% of the issues that are creating 80% of the problems that we are looking to address? There has to be an 80/20 rule where if we resolve that 20%, 80% of what is causing problems in the community will go away.

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: Commends the City Manager and City Council. Racism is a Public Health issue and we are working in every way to eliminate what that has caused. It is a social determinant of health, which the underlying cause is racism. Look forward to solving these issues.

Kevin Ksen, Worcester: One of the things that make this discussion difficult is the complete lack of transparency around police issues. The city has an ongoing lawsuit with the Worcester Telegram & Gazette over police discipline records. City Manager still has not reported the outcome when police officers coordinated a sickout following the discipline of a police officer who slapped a man while on a stretcher. Lieutenant Davenport reported to the Human Rights Commission that there is a police officer with 36 complaints against him/her. That officer's name and the complaints were never released. It is very difficult to discuss racism if we do not know the facts or details of what or has not happened. The BOH is a perfect group that works from data to force the city to release data to the community so we can have a real conversation.

Marie Brouillette, Worcester: These are people that are going through these traumatic events. We need to listen to them. This is not the time to get defensive. If your uncomfortable during these conversations, that is good. It means you are learning and understanding that something is going on. There is hard evidence that racism does exist. There are many ways to review this issue.

Zach Dyer, Worcester: Applauds the BOH for focusing their attention on addressing institutional and systemic racism. Racist policies are at the root of health and equity, which is the mandate of public health to address. Institutional and systemic racism does not simply mean that there are a lot of racist within an institution or within the system. That can be confusing. In efforts to address institutional racism, it cannot be just about addressing personally mediated racism or bias. They cannot just be limited to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. We need to recognize inequities exists because of a legacy of racist policies. Policies that explicitly or implicitly disadvantage black, Latinx and other communities of color. Undoing those harms requires that we implement policies that specifically benefit those communities.

Sheila Brenner, Worcester: Applaud the City Manager for coming up with this plan. Has a 12 year old who is going to middle school next year and is terrified of police because she is black. It is so easy for white people to say there is no systemic racism because it doesn't affect them. Sgt. Cipro, try to walk in someone else shoes. There is no excuse not to educate yourself about systemic racism in all the institutions in this country and city. This country was built with racism as its foundation. Until we acknowledge it, we will never be able to live together and prosper.

Khrystian King, Worcester City Councilor: Racism comes at a tremendous cost. The cost to the individuals, families, children, our community and folks that are victims. When you think about police misconduct or excessive force, it speaks to a layered effect of trauma. I was elected in 2016, as the first black male elected since 1936 (80 years in this city) that is structural and systemic racism. In 2016, I was honored to participate in the promotion of Captain Davenport (WPD). He was the first African American male promoted to that rank. He is not the first black African American, male or female, qualified for that job (also systemic racism). Commends all of the community groups that contributed to the direction that we are moving in as a city. Sadden that we are at a place where leadership in our City has not educated themselves enough on what systemic racism is.

Margot Barnet, Worcester: If you dismiss everything, you hear about racism, you will never hear it. I ask that you listen to it.

Frances Anthes: The CHIP (Community Health Improvement Plan), for a long time, has talked about health equity. We came to the idea of addressing racist and discrimination through the targeted evidence, based on things, because of health disparities and because of the way in which we saw people having unequal health outcomes based on race. We were in the middle of a pandemic in which we knew that death rates were 2 to 3 times more in black and Hispanics than white populations. In May 2020, we were already worried about racism as a health disparity about COVID19. Then George Floyd happened, Minneapolis happened. Racism was not just about COVID19, it was also, what we were seeing in terms of violence. At the Derek Chauvin's trial the Police Chief today said that the use of force to restrain George Floyd was not part of the ethics or value of the Minneapolis Police Department. One of the things we need to look at is how we go from what the City Manager, Police Chief and other authorities expect from their staff and what sometimes happens on the street.

Chareese Allan: Heard some of the fear, disappointment and anger that is going on in the community. Everyone's voice needs to be heard. Consider these voices and move forward. City manager has put initiatives in place and we need to ensure that the community is involved in making sure that these initiatives go into effect and are carried out.

David Fort: We are charged as Public Health professionals to litigate all public health issues that affect City of Worcester residents. BOH has been trying to work on these issues since last summer but were slowed down both internally and externally. Chief Sargent and Sgt. Cipro (WPD) have continually stated that racism does not exist. They have lied to us. Recently a T&G article specifically unveiled an act of racism by a police officer. How can you have trust, accountability and transparency when the people who are the leadership of the WPD not acknowledge racism inside of the WPD? Appreciates the City Manager putting these reforms in place. It is hard for me to believe that these reforms will be successful, if nothing is being done to the leadership of the WPD who does not acknowledge that there is a problem. Anything less than a police citizens review board with subpoena power, is not acceptable. That is the only way you will be able to have transparency and accountability.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: There is a lot of urgency around this discussion tonight. Am very hopeful that something will come of this. Is interested in hearing and learning more. If you have any questions or recommendations please send email to health@worcesterma.gov.

BOH members thanked City Manager, City Councilors, Chief of Police and the community for attending tonight's forum.

Chareese Allen made a motion to close the public hearing. Seconded by Frances Anthes. The motion passed unanimously

Motion to adjourn; Chareese Allen - seconded by David Fort

Adjourn 8:28pm

Next Meeting -- May 3, 2021 at 6:30pm

Potential Future Meeting Topics:

Continue Discussion on Public Forum on Institutional Racism, Police Reform and Public Health

COVID-19 Updates

Update on public schools / hybrid